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SUBJECT: WHERE ARE DARFUR'S HIJACKED CARS AND TRUCKS?

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Darfur's hijacking is a complex phenomenon, according to UNAMID, INGOs, and local contacts based in El-Fasher and Nyala. Most sources placed the majority of the blame on many different rebel movements, with one contact describing a transportation chain through SLM/MM and SLA/Unity-controlled areas from southeast to northwest Darfur. Most contacts claimed that vehicles are sold in Chad and Libya at a fraction of their value. See para 15 for recommendations on reducing the number of hijacked cars and trucks. END SUMMARY.

TYPES

12. (SBU) UNAMID, SLM/Minnawi, and INGO contacts all stated that large transportation trucks and Toyota Landcruisers are the two types of vehicles almost exclusively hijacked. However, vehicles ranging from motorcycles, bicycles, or even sewage trucks have all been hijacked in Darfur. (Note: On September 11, 2008 the UN News Center reported that a sewage truck was hijacked outside of El-Fasher. The report does not mention whether the truck was full at the time. End Note.) World Vision's local employee At Tayyeb Muhammad said that with respect to personal vehicles, the only type of vehicle ever stolen is the Toyota Landcruiser in one of its many forms (buffalo, pickup, four door, etc.) (Note: Muhammad is a local security advisor for World Vision in Nyala and will soon become an employee for the Embassy's Regional Security Office. End Note.)

PRICE

13. (SBU) Most contacts stated that Landcruisers are sold in Chad and Libya at a fraction of their value. Sources stated that depending on condition and age, Landcruisers are sold in Chad for a price between 2500 to 7500 USD. At-Tayyeb Muhammad told poloff that a hijacked vehicle is worth more in Chad than in Sudan, as "no one cares if you have a stolen vehicle there, and no one will ever ask you for registration or a license." He joked that Chadians view the Sudanese border as a "free trade zone." UN Security officers told emboffs that large trucks are sold for between forty to seventy thousand dollars in Chad or Libya. Larger trucks are often traded for Landcruisers, which are often then used by the rebel movements.

REBEL INVOLVEMENT

14. (SBU) UN Security in El-Fasher believes that SLM/MM and SLM/Unity are largely responsible for the banditry, while UN Security in Nyala noted that all major rebel movements are involved. UN Security in Nyala estimated that rebels or individuals with connections to the movements steal 60 percent of all vehicles. Almost all rebel groups, including disaffected Arab militias, are often behind many of the carjackings. UN Security sources stated that JEM has carried out some carjackings, though to a lesser extent than other movements. (Note: The GoS accused JEM of using cars stolen from the humanitarian community in the May 10 Omdurman attack, putting several of these vehicles on display in Omdurman.

End note.) SLM/MM contacts in Nyala admitted that isolated individuals in their movement "have only once or twice stolen cars." SLM/MM's Issam Hama of the South Darfur Legislative Council told poloff on September 17 that "no one can hijack a car in the city unless he is protected by the GoS" alleging that most of the highjacking in Nyala takes place in the north of the city where the Border Intelligence Force and Central Reserve Police have a significant presence. (Note: This week two vehicles owned by the Humanitarian Affairs Commission were reportedly stolen in Nyala, underscoring that the GoS is not always aware of or behind a carjacking. End Note.)

SLM/UNITY TRANSPORTATION CHAIN

15. (SBU) UN Security in El Fasher believes that SLM/Unity has a "transportation chain" of areas under its control in southeast Darfur and moving in a northwesterly direction toward the Chad and Libyan borders (near the following towns/villages: Sigeir Um Sa, Shaqq Al Gama, Tarny North, Disc, Onyo.) The majority of stolen vehicles are eventually transported and sold in Chad and Libya, as "the rebels are aware of international perception, and they do not want to earn the reputation as a gang of robbers," stated one UN Security source. This constitutes a change, noted this contact, as "several years ago almost all of the vehicles that were looted were not sold, but used by the rebel movements." This contact noted that he has not been able to verify rumors that there is a rebel-controlled "chop shop" outside of Sarif Umra near the border with North and West Darfur.

BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN INTERNATIONALS AND THEIVES

16. (SBU) A WFP Security Officer based in Nyala stated that the

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situation for carjacking in Nyala has grown from "bad to worse" in the last three years. According to him, in the early stages of the conflict, bandits targeted Sudanese civilians and targets of opportunity. Now, robbers have become more discriminating and sophisticated, "graduating from petty theft and looking for good durable vehicles that expatriates drive." The humanitarian community has responded by taking fewer trips out of the cities and renting vehicles for these longer excursions. Some INGOs, such as World Vision, have even locked up their Landcruisers, favoring local transportation within Darfur's cities. Some ambitious robbers have recognized this change and are now attempting to break into INGO compounds to steal vehicles. In response, some INGOs are considering sending their "mothballed" non-rented Landcruisers back to Khartoum or other parts of Sudan to remove the temptation and put the assets to use elsewhere under safer conditions.

WFP CONVOYS AND TRUCKS

17. (SBU) WFP contacts in Nyala stated that the rate of "truck-jackings" has risen in 2008. According to these contacts, three of WFP's trucks have already been stolen in September (trucks and drivers were recovered), and two in August are still missing along with their drivers. Sources stated that rebels often steal trucks after they have been unloaded, as they are lighter and more maneuverable. WFP added that abductions associated with the carjackings are very concerning, especially as there are over 40 commercially-contracted drivers still missing. WFP contacts stated that approximately thirty of their drivers subcontracted from another company recently went on strike, demanding better compensation given this increased threat. WFP sources stated that some of WFP's trucks have been targeted because of the goods that they carry. Hijackers have intentionally targeted trucks carrying high-value and resale cargo such as sugar, but have left behind lower-value cargo such as sorghum.

CONVOY PROTECTION HELPS, BUT THEY ARE TOO FEW AND TOO LARGE

18. (SBU) WFP contacts stated that GoS protection for WFP convoys is more effective than none at all, but that the GoS will only provide protection for massive convoys of 500 to 700 trucks. (Note: The GoS has previously stated that the minimum number of cars required for convoy protection would be 100, but WFP contacts

repeatedly discussed much higher convoy numbers, which may have more to do with the limited number of escort rotations provided by the GoS rather than a set, minimum vehicle requirement. End Note.) According to WFP contacts, these gigantic convoys have spread out over as many as 40 kilometers and take an incredible effort to coordinate. WFP says that trucks have waited for weeks in locations outside of Darfur to join one of these large convoys. This is particularly problematic on the dangerous Nyala-Geneina route, where escorts may only travel 2 times per month. Additionally, as South Darfur has established a requirement that all commercial trucks must travel with police escorts, there are reports of convoys traveling from West and North Darfur and being required to stop at the South Darfur border to wait for protection. "Although the convoys are effective, we simply cannot wait for the GoS to respond to our requests," noted WFP contacts. WFP also stated that when trucks break down in the convoy, they are left behind and inevitably hijacked. (Note: Under current escort operations, WFP is managing to get in only a fraction of the commodities required on a monthly basis, usually around just 60 percent of the necessary food dispatches, which has resulted in several months of reduced rations for IDPs and other conflict-affected populations. End Note.)

TRACKING SYSTEMS

19. (SBU) GPS tracking systems have had mixed success in assisting vehicle recovery efforts, as many hijackers have immediately dismantled their systems after stealing the vehicles. On the rare occasion when the systems have not been promptly dismantled, this technology has provided information about the final destination of some of the trucks. Limited data from tracking systems has revealed that rebel-held East Jebel Marra, Sudan; Bahai, Chad; and Libya are all common destinations for stolen vehicles.

SURVEILLANCE AND COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

10. (SBU) Another UN Security officer told poloff on September 16 that there is an extensive carjacking network throughout all of Darfur. "People have all the time in the world on their hands, and can sit outside of any office or base and inform their colleagues in the field when a convoy leaves," noted this officer. Continuing, this officer described Sudanese as incredibly communicative and curious people who are constantly passing information, both with good and bad intentions.

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CARJACKING WITHIN DARFUR'S MAJOR CITIES

11. (SBU) World Vision's Muhammad claimed that carjacking inside Darfur's towns and cities starts as a purely commercial activity. Although this criminal activity may have ties to rebel movements, those involved in the initial hijacking "are only in it for the money." Within the city, it is common for those involved to use tuk tuks (motorized tricycles) for their initial attack. Once the car is taken, occasionally a Landcruiser is brought to a "chop shop" in the city where it is dismantled and sold for parts. More likely, according to Muhammad, the car is taken at least ten kilometers outside of town to a designated meeting place where the criminal sells the car. According to Muhammad, the carjacker is occasionally paid with a motorcycle for return to the city. Outside of Nyala, Muhammad claimed that there are two major locations where robbers bring cars before transportation to Chad or Libya or delivery to rebel controlled areas. According to Muhammad, SLM/MM controls a stolen vehicle depot in Khorabeche, while a semi-autonomous Arab militia group (led by Janjaweed warlord Hamati or one of his commanders who have splintered from his group) controls another depot in Yara, approximately 50 kilometers west of Nyala. Muhammad claimed that he spoke to one Sudanese man whose car was hijacked. This individual reportedly followed his attackers all the way to Yara in another car, and then re-purchased his vehicle for approximately 5,000 USD.

CHECKPOINTS INEFFECTIVE

12. (SBU) Muhammad stated that checkpoints outside of Darfur's cities have not cut down on the number of carjackings for two major

reasons. Police and other paramilitary forces managing the checkpoints are corrupt and easily bribed. Moreover, Landcruisers can easily turn off onto unpaved tracks and bypass checkpoints or paved roads altogether.

SOUTH DARFUR PARTICULARLY BAD

13. (SBU) According to UN Security in Nyala, South Darfur ranks highest in carjackings in all three states. 85 vehicles have already been hijacked in 2008 (approximately 20 UN, 30 contractors, and 30 INGO vehicles). Despite a summer lull in carjackings, this activity is again on the rise with eight incidents this month in South Darfur. UN Security noted that GoS deployment to South Darfur has improved security in some areas, as exemplified by the Nyala-Ed Daien road. UN Security also stated that planned GoS deployment to the Menawashi has been delayed.

15. DARFUR COORDINATION COMMITTEE

14. (SBU) According to UNAMID Civil Affairs' Ali Hassan, a high-level delegation from UNAMID addressed the issue of carjackings with senior GoS officials including Nafie Ali Nafie and Salah Gosh on September 10. (Note: Hassan scoffed at the GoS's justification of staging widespread attacks in order to clean up the banditry and carjacking in North Darfur. End Note.) Following this meeting and further complaints from Hassan at the state-level, a committee composed of NISS, Police, and UNAMID was formed in South Darfur to combat hijackings. In their first meeting on September 16, GoS officials pledged to increase patrols outside UNAMID and INGO residential areas, particularly during the early evening. NISS and the police will also dispatch plain-clothes police and agents to collect intelligence about the carjacking trade. Hassan was hopeful that these procedures will make a positive difference in reducing carjackings, specifically noting the importance of better intelligence on hijackings. For its part, UNAMID pledged to quickly inform the GoS of security incidents, provide better security information to its staff, and consider moving to compound housing in Nyala closer to work locations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

15. (SBU) Contacts were quick to lump car and truck hijacking in the same category, but carjacking within cities should be differentiated from robberies conducted on Darfur's long and isolated roads. Given the heavy military and police presence in Darfur's three major cities, there is no reason that the number of incidents cannot be significantly reduced if there is a good faith effort by the GoS and improved coordination between UNAMID, INGOs, and the GoS. Committees (such as the one already in South Darfur) should be established at the state level in North and West Darfur. Another committee for all three states should also be formed for standardizing convoy protection, sharing intelligence, and improving overall coordination. Other creative options should be considered such as: using new (and less easily dismantled) tracking and

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beaconing devices, though the GoS may resist allowing the use of such equipment; marking vehicles with permanent and distinct identification and ownership information; painting cars with distinct colors and patterns for use only within cities (as was done in Liberia and other conflict areas); stronger border monitoring, especially outside of El-Geneina. We will continue to stress the importance of this issue to GoS, rebel, and UNAMID contacts and work to combat this illegal trade that feeds off Darfur's misery.

16. (SBU) Chiefs of Missions from donor countries (US, Canada, UK, France, Italy, Norway, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, and EU) met on September 22 to discuss this phenomenon and agreed on the need to gather more information, identify criminal networks, and find creative ways to provide disincentives for this hijacking. COMs were also conscious that INGOs and the UN are very concerned that no action be taken that makes a bad situation even worse.

17. (SBU) Embassy Khartoum welcomes any additional light Embassies Ndjamena and Tripoli can shed on this subject.

